

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 10, 2006

The Honorable Thomas A. Shannon  
Assistant Secretary  
for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Ambassador Shannon:

We respectfully write to urge your public support for the protection of women and human rights defenders in Guatemala. We request that your office provide increased technical assistance for timely and thorough investigations of homicides. We also ask that you encourage the Guatemalan government to allocate adequate support and resources for the protection of victims of attacks, as well as witnesses, friends and family members.

Despite the specific commitments by the Guatemalan government to protect the lives of women and human rights defenders, increased violence against women, men and children in Guatemala is fast spiraling out of control. According to statistics from the Guatemalan National Civilian Police (PNC), the number of women who were murdered in 2005 represented a 110 percent increase from the number reported in 2002. By comparison the number of men who were murdered during the same time period rose by 41 percent. Most of these women and adolescent girls are from poor urban areas. Prosecution of these crimes is almost nonexistent, and consequently the attacks on women have become more frequent and brutal.


Non-governmental women's and human rights organizations in Guatemala, along with the Special Rapporteurs on Women from both the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS), have noted the inadequate response from the government to the killing of women. There is a disconcerting tendency by local authorities to blame the victims instead of focusing resources on investigating the crimes and prosecuting the assailants. Human rights leaders throughout the world have expressed concerns that the increase in criminality creates a perception that there is a basic lack of safety and accountability in Guatemala. A 2004 report by the OAS Special Rapporteur on Women highlights that the justice system has not responded effectively to such crimes, giving rise to both impunity and an increased sense of insecurity among women.

To counter this destabilizing trend in a close U.S. ally, we strongly encourage you to allocate appropriate resources and undertake diplomatic measures to address the crisis. Positive first steps in this regard would include supporting the implementation of the National Plan for the Prevention and Eradication of Domestic and Interfamilial Violence. We need to reinforce existing forensic teams and provide other investigative tools. Additional assistance should be provided to harmonize data collection on crimes against women and human rights defenders. Finally, to bring alleged assailants to justice and combat the culture of impunity, we urge you

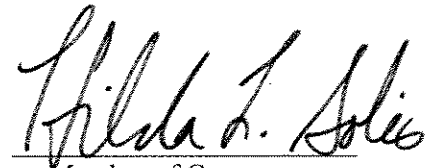
to increase public support for the Guatemalan human rights ombudsman and other victims' rights advocates.

We look forward to collaborating with you on these and other issues, and to receiving regular reports on the progress and the response of the Guatemalan government to these concerns.

Sincerely,

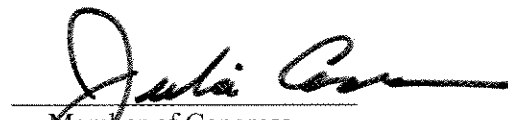
  
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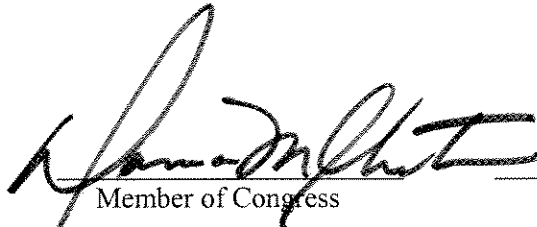
  
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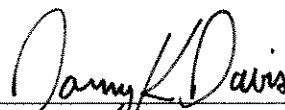
  
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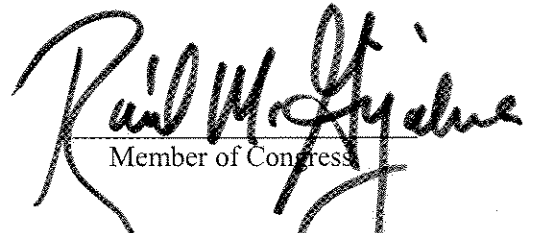
  
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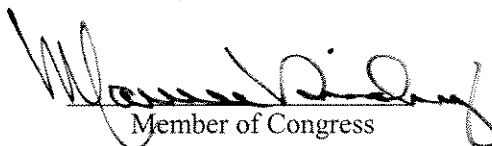
  
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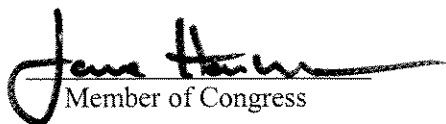
  
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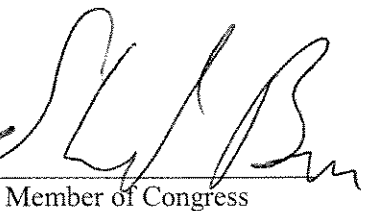
  
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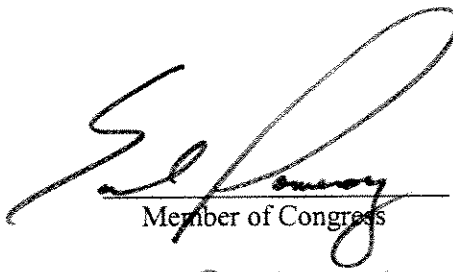
  
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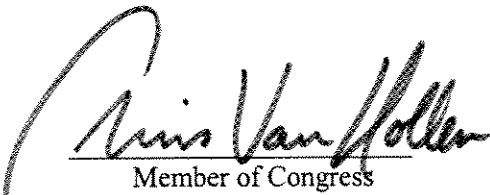
  
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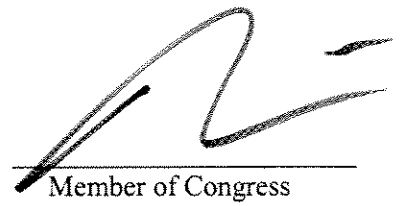
  
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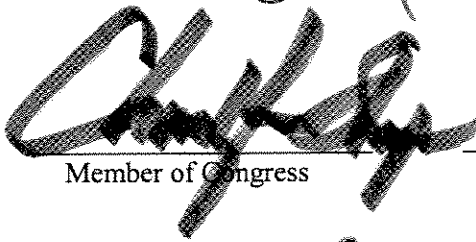
  
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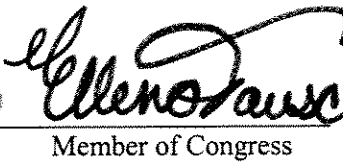
  
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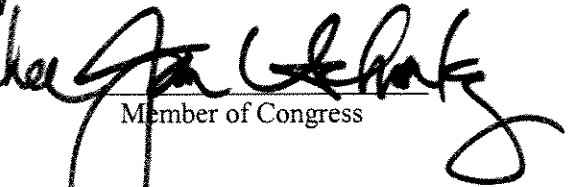
  
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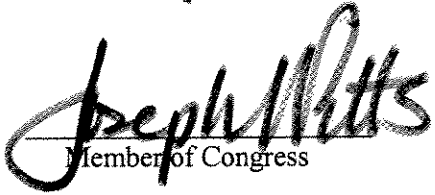
  
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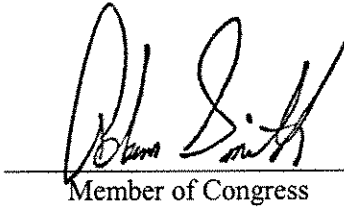
  
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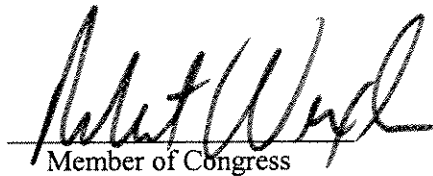
  
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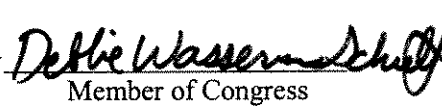
  
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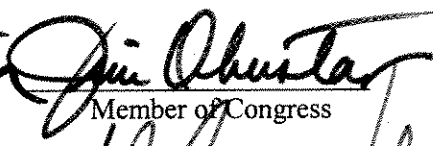
  
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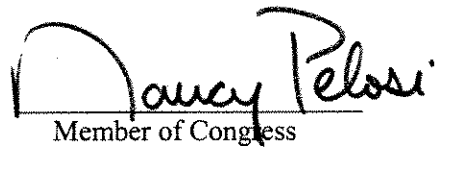
  
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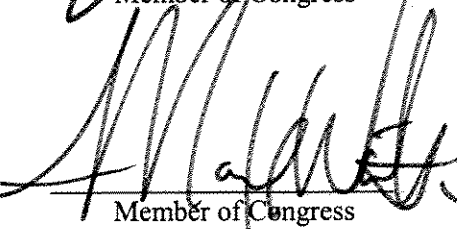
  
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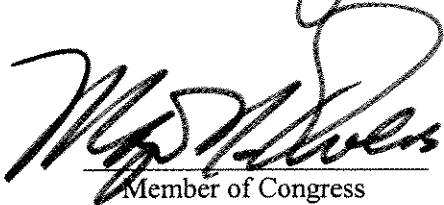
  
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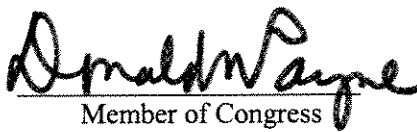
  
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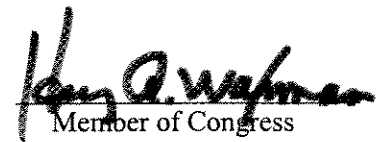
  
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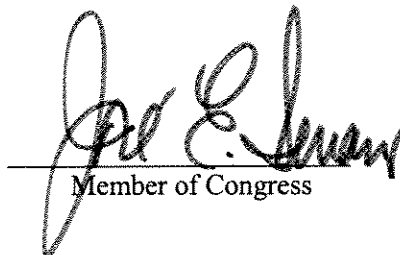
  
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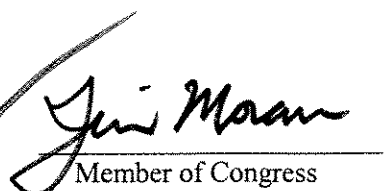
  
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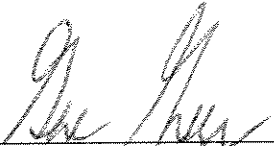
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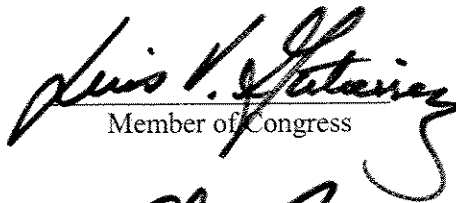
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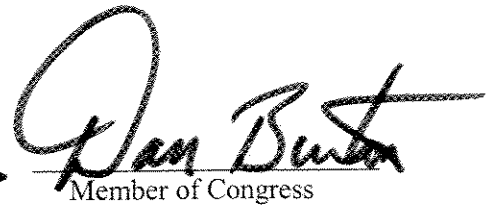
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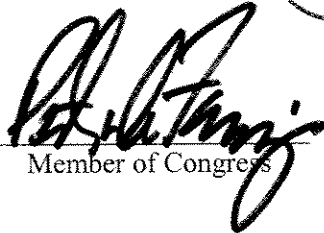
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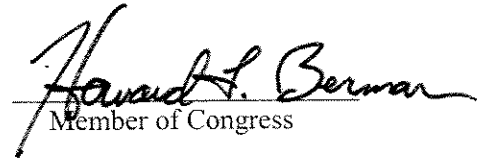
  
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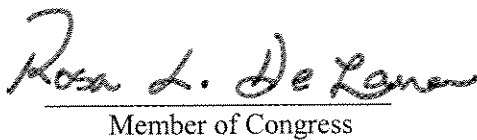
  
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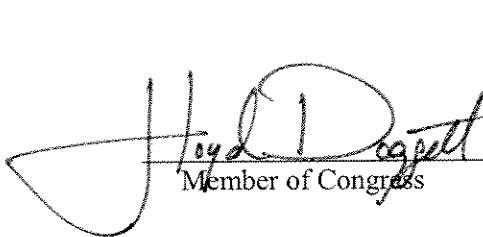
  
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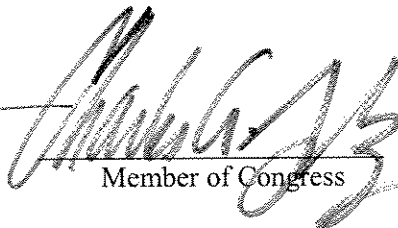
  
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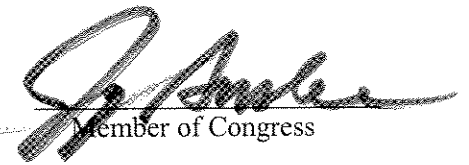
  
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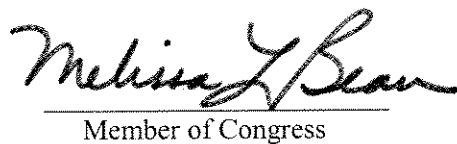
  
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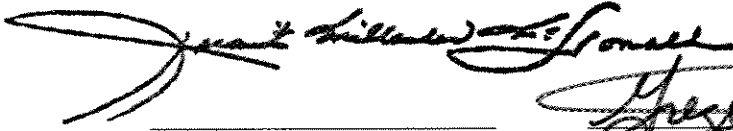
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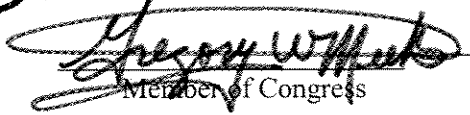
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